

The Late Patrick Francis Morris (1896 – 1974)

by J. H. WILLIS

Frank Morris died at Lynn Private Hospital, Armadale, on 11 January last, only five days short of his 78th birthday. The first nine months of his babyhood had overlapped the life of Baron von Mueller, who died on 10 Oct., 1896. At 17 years of age (28 Aug. 1913), young Frank joined the staff of the National Herbarium of Victoria, remaining with this institution for the next 48 years—until retirement on his 65th birthday (16 Jan. 1961). During almost half a century of botanical work in the place where Mueller had laboured for 39 years, something of the spirit and many of the traditions of his great forerunner were naturally absorbed. Early in his professional career he worked under Professor A. J. Ewart (*obit* Aug. 1937) who occupied simultaneously the first botanical chair in Melbourne University and the office of Government Botanist, sharing time between the University and Herbarium. At retirement Frank was the Senior Botanical Officer of Melbourne Herbarium.

Daniel Morris, his father, was a South Yarra veterinarian, who, in common with other local residents, used to graze his milking cows in Fawkner Park. Most probably this early contact with animal health and husbandry served to shape Frank's lifelong interest in grasses, pasture plants and weeds. He never married, but lived for many years with his widowed mother and single sister, Celia, at 6 Mandeville Crescent, Toorak, until they successively died and his own failing health over the past two years made hospitalization a necessity.

In view of Frank's long period of botanical service, he published relatively little; but, with only two or at

most three on the Herbarium staff (and with *no* technical or library assistance whatever) for many years, it is understandable that there would be very little official time for research or writing. Nowadays, much of the advisory service previously expected from and given by officers of the National Herbarium has passed to agrostologists and other specialists in the ever-expanding Department of Agriculture, to the Forest Products Division of C.S.I.R.O. and the various biological research units of our three universities.

It is unfortunate that most present members of the F.N.C.V. know little or nothing of him, for he joined the Club in June 1918, was President in succession to the late P. Crosbie Morrison during a difficult war year (July 1943 - June 1944) and was elected to



P. F. Morris [photo: 1930]

honorary membership in April 1959. He wrote a number of interesting articles and notes for the *Victorian Naturalist*, two of his more important papers being "Grasses of the Melbourne District" (Jan. 1927) and "Native and Introduced *Aizoaceae*", with a colour plate, that appeared in the special jubilee volume, 50, of the journal (Sept. 1933); his last contribution was "Notes on *Xanthium* Species, 'Cockleburrs'" (Sept. 1957) —resulting from researches in British herbaria during his term as Botanical Liaison Officer at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in 1956.

I worked in close association with Frank for 23 years at Melbourne Herbarium and found him invariably a jovial, outgoing companion, ever prepared to aid other people and to speak his mind in a loud voice — however embarrassing the circumstances may have been! Outside office hours, he was a most enthusiastic member of the Banks Rowing Club, regularly coaching crews on the Yarra River. A large

chiffonier in his home was stacked with cups and trophies he had won at rowing and sculling. His knowledge of Port Phillip Bay, its channels, sandbanks, tides, weather and fish populations was surprisingly extensive and doubtless gleaned from long acquaintance as part-owner of a pleasure yacht.

Latterly he concentrated on bowling, where his expertise in turf culture and green-keeping was widely sought. Always interested in youth welfare work, he would annually collect toys and do them up for distribution to children's homes. Only a month before his death, P. F. Morris made a gift of \$300 to the funds of our Field Naturalists Club. It is fitting that the name of this kindly, extrovert botanist should be perpetuated in those of a handsome downy tussock-grass (*Poa morrisii*) and a delightfully elfish midge-orchid (*Prasophyllum morrisii*) having dark purplish-brown flowers with exceedingly mobile and hairy labella.

Field Naturalists Club of Victoria

General Meeting — 10 June

At the June meeting the speaker was Dr. Brian Smith of the National Museum who gave us a fascinating insight into "The Environmental Study of the Dartmouth Dam". The Museum has had a team working on the invertebrates of the area and Dr. Smith showed slides of the Mitta Mitta River and the inundation area at various seasons, as well as describing the techniques used to collect insects and aquatic life, often working under difficult and unpleasant conditions. He said that this was the first study of its kind that had been done in Victoria, and the information gathered would be valuable in assessing the effects of the dam on downstream rivers.

The Secretary tabled a letter from the Westernport Regional Planning Auth-

ority advising that an appeal had been lodged against the decision to disallow subdivision of Green's "Main Ridge Estate" on Mornington Peninsula. Mr. Riordan said that the Club was entitled to present a further submission when the appeal is heard.

Mr. Dan McInnes spoke about the effects of rising costs on the Club, particularly in regard to the *Victorian Naturalist*, and pointed out that each issue priced at 45 cents was now costing the Club 70 cents. Council had appointed a sub-committee to review the situation and its recommendations would be put into effect as soon as possible.

Miss Ivy Dixon, who has been a member for forty years, was elected to honorary membership in accordance with the by-laws of the Club.